

Malachi 3:16-4:6
December 6, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Have you ever seen pastors, or ministers, or missionaries ever get discouraged in serving God to the point of leaving ministry? If yes, what are some of the reasons why? [Let people engage – Burnout, division in the church, lack of growth, etc.]

Transition: The reasons you've offered are valid. You can see their thinking behind their reason for leaving ministry. They were worn out. They felt defeated. They were emotionally spent on dealing with divisions within the church. They felt unsuccessful because the church wasn't growing. These ministers served God with a heart of love and devotion for God.

But that can't be said for most of the people and the priests in Malachi's day. They had become calloused and indifferent toward serving God. Why? There was apparently no reward for serving Him. All they could see was the guy who arrogantly defies God and is living a happy life. Consequently, they were going through the motions of serving God, but their heart was far away.

But that was not true for "all" of the priests of Malachi's day. There was a group of priests who were listening and hearing the prophet's message loud and clear. And then the Lord will speak to address the judgments to come for the evildoers. Let's pick up the storyline to see their response. Let's begin.

BOOK:

¹⁶Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name.

¹⁷"They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

The Day of the Lord

4 "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. ² But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. ³ Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty.

⁴"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Malachi speaks to the hearts of a troubled people whose circumstances of financial insecurity, religious skepticism, and personal disappointments are similar to those God's people often experience or encounter today. The book contains a message that must not be overlooked by those who wish to encounter the Lord and His kingdom and to lead others to a similar encounter. Its message concerns God's loving and holy character and His unchanging and glorious purposes for His people. Our God calls His people to genuine worship, to fidelity both to Himself and to one another, and to expectant faith in what He is doing and says He will do in this world and for His people.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). Commentary on the Old Testament (Vol. 10, pp. 661–663). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

Mal. 3:16–18. With these foolish speeches the prophet proceeds in vv. 16ff. to contrast the conduct of those who fear God, pointing to the blessing which they derive from their piety. V. 16. *“Then those who feared Jehovah conversed with one another, and Jehovah attended and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for those who fear Jehovah and reverence His name.* V. 17. *And they will be to me as a possession, saith Jehovah of hosts, for the day that I create, and I will spare them as a man spareth his son that serveth him.* V. 18. *And ye will again perceive the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.”* וְאָז, then, indicates that the conversation of those who feared God had been occasioned by the words of the ungodly. The substance of this conversation is not described more minutely, but may be gathered from the context, namely, from the statement as to the attitude in which Jehovah stood towards them. We may see from this, that they strengthened themselves in their faith in Jehovah, as the holy God and just Judge who would in due time repay both the wicked and the righteous according to their deeds, and thus presented a great contrast to the great mass with their blasphemous sayings. This description of the conduct of the godly is an indirect admonition to the people, as to what their attitude towards God ought to be. What was done by those who feared Jehovah ought to be taken as a model by the whole nation which called Jehovah its God. Jehovah not only took notice of these conversations, but had them written in a book of remembrance, to reward them for them in due time. Writing in a book of remembrance recalls to mind the custom of the Persians, of having the names of those who deserved well of the king entered in a book with a notice of their merits, that they might be rewarded for them at some future time (Esth. 6:1); but it rests upon the much older idea, that the names and actions of the righteous are written in a book before God (cf. Ps. 56:9, Dan. 7:10). This book was written לְפָנָיו, before Jehovah, i.e., not in His presence, but in order that it might lie before Jehovah, and remind Him of the righteous and their deeds. לְיִרְאָה is a *dat. com.*: “for those who fear God,” i.e., for their good. הִשָּׁב שֵׁם, to consider or value the name of the Lord (cf. Isa. 13:17; 33:8). This writing was done because the Lord would make them His own on the day of His coming, and show them mercy. *Layyōm*: for the day = on the day; the *lamed* denoting the time, as in Isa. 10:3, Gen. 21:2, etc. The day which Jehovah makes is the day of the judgment which attends His coming. *S^egullâh* is the object, not to *'ōseh*, as we might suppose according to the accents, but to *hâyū*: they will be my possession on the day which I create. This is evident partly from a comparison of v. 21, where the words יוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה recur, and partly from the original passage in Ex. 19:5: ye will be to me *s^egullâh*, i.e., a valued possession (see the comm.). The righteous will then be a possession for Jehovah, because on that day the glory of the children of God will first be revealed, and the Israel of God will reach the mark of its heavenly calling (see Col. 3:4). The Lord will spare them in the judgment as a father spares his son who serves him. The expression *to spare* may be explained from the contrast to the punishment of the ungodly. In v. 18 the prophet bids the murmurers consider what has been said concerning the righteous, by telling them that they will then see the difference between the righteous who serve God, and the wicked who do not serve Him, that is to say, will learn that it is always profitable to serve God. שֶׁבָרְאָם before רְאִיתָם is to be taken adverbially: ye will see again. The expression “again” presupposes that the difference between those who feared God and the ungodly was to be seen before, and that the Lord had already made it manifest by former judgments. This had

been the case in Egypt, where the Lord had caused such a separation to be made (Ex. 11:7). The words do not imply that the persons addressed had previously stood in a different relation to this question from that in which they were standing then (Koehler). רָאָה בֵּינֵינוּ does not mean to look in between (Hitzig), but בֵּינֵינוּ is used in the sense of a substantive, signifying that which is between the two, the difference between the two. That בֵּינֵינוּ was originally a noun is evident from the dual הַבְּיָנִים in 1 Sam. 17:4, 23.

Mal. 4:1–3. This admonition to the ungodly is explained in Mal. 4:1ff. by a picture of the separation which will be effected by the day of judgment. V. 1. *“For behold the day cometh burning like a furnace, and all the proud and every doer of wickedness become stubble, and the coming day will burn them, saith Jehovah of hosts, so that it will not leave them root or branch.* V. 2. *But to you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise and healing in its wings, and ye will go out and skip like stalled calves,* V. 3. *And will tread down the ungodly, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I create, saith Jehovah of hosts.”* The day of judgment will be to the ungodly like a burning furnace. “A fire burns more fiercely in a furnace than in the open air” (Hengstenberg). The ungodly will then resemble the stubble which the fire consumes (cf. Isa. 5:24, Zeph. 1:18, Ob. 18, etc.). וְדִים and רֵשָׁעִים point back to v. 15. Those who are called blessed by the murmuring nation will be consumed by the fire, as stubble is burned up, and indeed *all* who do wickedness, and therefore the murmurers themselves. אֲשֶׁר before לֹא יִעֲזֹב is a conjunction, *quod*; and the subject is not Jehovah, but the coming day. The figure “root and branch” is borrowed from a tree—the tree is the ungodly mass of the people (cf. Amos 2:9)—and denotes total destruction, so that nothing will be left of them. To the righteous, on the other hand, the sun of righteousness will arise. *Ts^edâqâh* is an epexegetical genitive of apposition. By the sun of righteousness the fathers, from Justin downwards, and nearly all the earlier commentators understand *Christ*, who is supposed to be described as the rising sun, like Jehovah in Ps. 84:12 and Isa. 60:19; and this view is founded upon a truth, viz., that the coming of Christ brings justice and salvation. But in the verse before us the context does not sustain the personal view, but simply the idea that righteousness itself is regarded as a sun. *Ts^edâqâh*, again, is not justification or the forgiveness of sins, as Luther and others suppose, for there will be no forgiving of sins on the day of judgment, but God will then give to every man reward or punishment according to his works. *Ts^edâqâh* is here, what it frequently is in Isaiah (e.g., Isa. 45:8; 46:13; 51:5, etc.), righteousness in its consequences and effects, the sum and substance of salvation. Malachi uses *ts^edâqâh*, righteousness, instead of יְשׁוּעָה, salvation, with an allusion to the fact, that the ungodly complained of the absence of the judgment and righteousness of God, that is to say, the righteousness which not only punishes the ungodly, but also rewards the good with happiness and salvation. The sun of righteousness has מְרַפֵּא, healing, in its wings. The wings of the sun are the rays by which it is surrounded, and not a figure denoting swiftness. As the rays of the sun spread light and warmth over the earth for the growth and maturity of the plants and living creatures, so will the sun of righteousness bring the healing of all hurts and wounds which the power of darkness has inflicted upon the righteous. Then will they go forth, sc. from the holes and caves, into which they had withdrawn during the night of suffering and where they had kept themselves concealed, and skip like stalled calves (cf. 1 Sam. 28:24), which are driven from the stall to the pasture. On *pūsh*, see at Hab. 1:8. And not only will those who fear God be liberated from all oppression, but they will also acquire power over the ungodly. They will tread down the wicked, who will then have become ashes, and lie like ashes upon the ground, having been completely destroyed by the fire of the judgment (cf. Isa. 26:5, 6).

Mal. 4:4–6. Concluding Admonition—V. 4. “Remember ye the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him upon Horeb for all Israel, statutes and rights. V. 5. Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the day of Jehovah comes, the great and terrible one. V. 6. And he will turn the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, that I may not come and smite the land with the curse” (*mit dem Banne*, with the ban). The admonition, “Remember ye the law of Moses,” forms the conclusion not only of the last section (Mal. 3:13–4:3), but of the whole of the book of Malachi, and cannot be connected with v. 3 in the sense of “Remember what Moses has written in the law concerning Christ, or concerning the judgment,” as Theod. Mops. and others maintain; nor must it be restricted to the time previous to the coming of the Messiah by the interpolation of *interim* (v. Til and Mich.). It is rather a perfectly general admonition to lay to heart and observe the law. For this is referred to here, “not according to its casual and transient form, but according to its real essence as expressing the holiness of God, just as in Matt. 5:17” (Hengstenberg). Malachi thus closes by showing to the people what it is their duty.

Blaising, C. A. (1985). Malachi. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 1586-1588)

D. The response of the believing remnant (3:16)

3:16. The word **then** (*'āz*) is emphatic, indicating that the action described in this verse was a consequence of the preceding confrontation. It is difficult to tell whether this remnant (**those who feared the LORD**) differs from the preceding questioners (vv. 13–15), is the same, or is a part of them. If the two groups are in some way identical, then the righteous repented of their harsh words and were then strengthened in their faith. But if they are unrelated, then their attitude and speech contrasted with the people in verses 13–15. What they said to **each other** is unknown, but it probably concerned a renewed perspective of God’s faithfulness as was true in other similar struggles over these issues (cf. Ps. 73; Ecc. 12:13–14). Their fear of God exemplifies the response which God desired from this oracle. The **scroll of remembrance** means that a permanent remembrance of their faithful and reverent response is kept in heaven. This provides assurance that when God deals with these individuals He will not forget their submission to Him.

E. The warning and promise of God (3:17–4:3)

3:17–18. Those who fear the Lord (v. 16) will become His **in the day** He makes up His **treasured possession**. “The day” (also mentioned in 3:2 and 4:1; cf. “that ... day” in 4:5) is the day of the Lord. It will be a day of judgment on the wicked and of deliverance for the righteous (God **will spare them**). As a result, Israel **will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked**. In previous times Israel had seen God intervene decisively in judgment and deliverance (e.g., the Exodus, the Exile, and the return). Those events pointed up a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. The future day of the Lord, however, will bring about a much more extensive judgment on the wicked, and through physical deliverance and bodily resurrection, the righteous will be His “treasured possession” in the kingdom, fulfilling God’s original intention for Israel (Ex. 19:5–6; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4). This hope renews the righteous and strengthens their fear of God.

4:1. Malachi here elaborated on **the day** of the Lord. As in 3:2–3, the judgment on that day is described as a judgment of **fire**. The fact that **it will burn like a furnace** stresses not only its intensity but also its judgmental purpose; it is not a fire that burns out of control. Unlike 3:2–3, which emphasized the purification of Israel (in particular, the Levites), this passage emphasizes the destruction of the wicked (cf. Isa. 66:15; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8). So complete will be the judgment that the wicked (**the arrogant and every evildoer**; cf. Mal. 3:15), compared to **stubble**, will **not** have **a root or a branch** remaining. This does not mean annihilation in the sense of cessation of being (the wicked will be resurrected, Dan. 12:2), but rather the complete exclusion of the wicked from God’s kingdom (cf. Matt. 25:46).

4:2. The day of the Lord, which will be like a fire to the wicked, will in contrast be like sunshine to God’s people. The phrase **the sun of righteousness** appears only here in Scripture. Though many commentators have taken these words to refer to Christ, the phrase seems to refer to the day of the Lord in general. In the kingdom, righteousness will pervade like the sun. **Healing** (*marpē*, “health or restoration”) **in its wings** (or rays) refers to the restorative powers of righteousness, which are like the healthful rays of the sun. God’s people will be spiritually restored and renewed.

The righteous are described as **you who revere My name** (cf. comments on “My name” in 1:6). “Revere” translates the same Hebrew word rendered “fear” in 3:5 and “feared” in 1:14; 3:16. Revering God contrasts with saying “harsh things” against God (3:13). The fact that the righteous rather than the wicked are personally addressed indicates the Lord’s contempt for the wicked as much as His love for His own. The figure of **calves** enjoying open pasture after being cooped up in a pen (**stall**) expresses the future satisfaction and joy of the righteous (cf. Isa. 65:17–25; Hosea 14:4–7; Amos 9:13–15; Zeph. 3:19–20).

4:3. The righteous will **trample down the wicked**, who **will be like ashes under the ... feet** of the righteous. This not only indicates the finality of the judgment on the wicked, but it also brings to a sharp conclusion the answer in this oracle to the cynical question asked by the unfaithful Israelites, “What do we gain by carrying out His requirements?” (3:14)

VIII. **Conclusion: Be Prepared for God’s Coming (4:4–6)**

A. *The present preparation (4:4)*

4:4. In light of all that has been said about the Mosaic Covenant and Malachi’s concern for the people’s covenant faithfulness and obedience, this concluding exhortation was appropriately direct and to the point. The verb **remember** (*zākar*) is used 14 times in Deuteronomy as an exhortation to Israel concerning this covenant **Law**. This command can refer to: (a) mental acts of remembering or paying attention to something, or to (b) mental acts combined with appropriate external actions (in other words, recalling and obeying), or to (c) acts of reciting or repeating something verbally (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “*zākar*,” 1:241). In light of Malachi’s insistence on obedience, meaning (b) seems to be the force of this command: “Recall it to mind and do it!”

The reference to **My servant Moses** not only speaks of Moses’ faithfulness (Heb. 3:5) but also reminds the reader that the Lord Almighty (Mal. 4:3) is the same God who powerfully displayed His judgments and His salvation at the time of the Exodus. And He is the Living God who gave the Ten Commandments to the people **at Horeb** (the ancient name for Mount Sinai; Ex. 3:1; Deut. 5:2; Ps. 106:19). He graciously accepted Moses’ role as prophetic mediator in the giving of the entire Law (Deut. 5:23–31). The people in Malachi’s time needed a renewed fear of

God; they needed to repent and be faithful to God's covenant. Such repentance would cause them to benefit from rather than suffer in the coming day of the Lord.

B. The future preparation (4:5–6)

4:5–6. God promised through Malachi that **the Prophet Elijah** would come and minister **before** the day of the Lord. (See comments under “Major Interpretive Problems” in the *Introduction* to Joel.) This is the only passage in the Prophets that speaks of a future ministry for Elijah. Many commentators have linked this prophecy to 3:1 which speaks of a messenger who prepares the way for the Lord's coming. However, Matthew (Matt. 11:7–10) specifically states that John the Baptist was the messenger (Mal. 3:1) who prepared the way for the Lord. But should John the Baptist also be considered the fulfillment of the prophecy about Elijah? (Mal. 4:5–6) Before John the Baptist was born an angel of the Lord predicted that he would minister “in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). This would seem to put together the two prophecies (Mal. 3:1 and 4:5–6) and to see John as fulfilling both of them.

However, while he freely admitted that he was the one who prepared the way for the Lord (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1), John expressly denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21–23). Even when Jesus called John “the Elijah who was to come,” He conditioned that designation with the phrase, “if you are willing to accept it” (Matt. 11:14). A solution to the problem seems to be offered in Matthew 17. After Elijah appeared with Christ in His transfiguration, the disciples asked about Elijah's future coming. Jesus, speaking apparently after John's death (cf. Matt. 14:1–2), affirmed that “Elijah comes and will restore all things” (Matt. 17:11). This future expectation indicates that Malachi 4:5–6 was *not* fulfilled in the ministry of John. Israel did not accept John the Baptist as the Elijah-like restorer of all things, so another Elijah-like forerunner is yet to come before the day of the Lord.

However, Jesus went on to say, “Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him” (Matt. 17:12), and the disciples understood He was talking about John the Baptist (Matt. 17:13). The solution to all this seems to be that though John did not fulfill Malachi 4:5–6 (for Elijah is yet to come), Elijah was a type of John in that there is a great deal of similarity between Elijah in 4:5–6 and the messenger (John the Baptist) in 3:1.

It is difficult to determine whether the Elijah to come is Elijah himself (as possibly indicated in Matt. 17:11) or someone in the spirit and power of Elijah (as John was, so that Christ referred to him as simply Elijah, Matt. 17:12). The latter seems preferable. The most likely New Testament reference to this future Elijah-like ministry is Revelation 11:1–13, which speaks of the two witnesses in the Tribulation. Possibly the Apostle John was expanding the Elijah expectation into an Elijah-Elisha ministry (cf. comments on Rev. 11:3–6.) As a result of the ministry of the two witnesses many people will repent, thus uniting **the hearts of ... fathers with their children**. This repentance will mean that they will not experience God's judgment in the day of the Lord.

The last words of the Old Testament are Malachi's ominous anticipation of the **great and dreadful day of the LORD**. This event of judgment, a climactic event in history, was a major theme of the prophets. The force of the warnings and appeals in Malachi's book hinges as much on the certainty of this coming judgment as on the covenant-based offer of grace. The Book of Revelation renders the same expectation of judgment and repentance at the end of the New Testament (Rev. 22:12–17) but with greater details about the One who will return.

Clendenen, E. R. (1998). The Minor Prophets. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman concise Bible commentary (pp. 394–396). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

RETURN AND REMEMBER THE LAW (3:7–4:6)

The final address begins and ends with commands. The first section (3:7–10a) contains two commands: first to “return” to the Lord, then to evidence that return by bringing Him the tithes and offerings they had been withholding. Devoting to the Lord a tenth of one’s produce as representative of the whole was an expression of faith and a recognition that all one’s possessions were a gift of God. The tithe was used to support the temple personnel and the helpless members of society (see Neh. 13:10; Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 18:21–32; Deut. 12:5–18; 14:22–29; 26:12–15). The “offerings” were the priestly portions of all the sacrifices brought to the temple (Num. 18:8–20).

In 3:10b–12 the Lord promises blessing from heaven, from the land, and from the nations if Judah would be faithful to Him. As in all the Old Testament promises of material blessings, these applied to the nation, not the individual. Applying such promises to individuals is a misinterpretation that the Book of Job and later Jesus (Matt. 19:23–25; John 9:3) speak against.

Judah’s complacency toward serving the Lord is exhibited by their speech in 3:13–15. The difficulties they had been encountering, together with their perverse perspective on their own righteousness and their seriously flawed understanding of what it means to have a relationship with God, had led them to a false conclusion. They had decided that there was no advantage in serving God (see Ps. 73:13) and that there was no real difference between righteousness and wickedness (see Isa. 5:20). What perverse thinking our wicked minds can lead us into, when not guided by God’s truth!

The final motivation offered to encourage repentance is the coming day when the Lord will separate the righteous and the wicked and will gather together His “treasured possession” (3:16–4:3; see Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:1–2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4). The message alternates between hope (3:16–18; 4:2) and judgment (4:1), combining the two in the last verse. It begins with a figurative anecdote whose point is that the Lord knows those who fear Him. The “scroll of remembrance” may refer to a heavenly book of destiny known from Psalms 40:7; 139:16; Isaiah 34:16; Daniel 7:10; and Revelation 20:12. The fiery element of the coming day in 4:1 echoes similar images in eschatological passages such as Joel 2:3–5 (see Ps. 21:9; Isa. 31:9). The word for “furnace” here can also mean “oven” and is used as a divine image in Genesis 15:17. The “sun of righteousness” refers to the Messiah whose appearance will be celebrated like the dawn because “in its wings” (i.e., the wings of the dawn; see Ps. 139:9) will be healing for those who fear the Lord (see Deut. 32:39; 2 Chr. 7:14; Isa. 6:10; 53:5; 57:18–19; 58:8; Jer. 33:6; Hos. 14:4).

Because the Lord remembers those who fear Him and honor His name (3:16), He commands Israel in the last section to “remember the law” revealed to Moses (4:4–6). As the people of Israel were to wear tassels as constant reminders of the Lord’s instructions (Num. 15:38–40), so Malachi was calling them to a lifestyle guided at all times not by human wisdom, ambition, or societal expectations but by the thoughtful application of God’s Word. Only this divine lighthouse can guide God’s people to avoid destruction on “that great and dreadful day of the LORD.”

Elijah’s role as preparatory proclaimer of the time of divine intervention derives from his being viewed as the quintessential prophet of repentance. As he appears with Moses in these final verses of the Old Testament, so he appeared with Moses representing the prophets to testify

to Jesus as the Messiah on the mountain of Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 17:3; Luke 9:29–31). The prophecy here was also fulfilled in part by John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14; 17:10–13; Luke 1:15–17). But Jesus indicated that an additional fulfillment awaits the time of His return (Matt. 11:14; 17:11), perhaps as reflected in the prophecy of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3 (see Deut. 19:15).

Elijah's coming before the day of the Lord will result in a great revival of faith in Israel, expressed here as fathers and their "children" (or sons) turning (the same verb translated "return" in 3:7) their hearts toward each other. As quoted in Luke 1:17, it describes fathers turning compassionately toward their children and disobedient people accepting the wisdom of the righteous.

Theological and Ethical Significance. Malachi speaks to the hearts of a troubled people whose circumstances of financial insecurity, religious skepticism, and personal disappointments are similar to those God's people often experience or encounter today. The book contains a message that must not be overlooked by those who wish to encounter the Lord and His kingdom and to lead others to a similar encounter. Its message concerns God's loving and holy character and His unchanging and glorious purposes for His people. Our God calls His people to genuine worship, to fidelity both to Himself and to one another, and to expectant faith in what He is doing and says He will do in this world and for His people.

God's love is paramount. It is expressed in Malachi in terms of God's election and protection of Israel above all the nations of the world. Since God has served the interests of Judah out of His unchanging love, He requires Judah to live up to its obligations by obedience and loyalty to Him and not empty ritualism in worship. This love relationship between God and Judah is the model by which the individual is expected to treat his neighbor; we are bound together as a community created by God, we are responsible for one another, and we are required to be faithful in our dealings with one another at every point in life.

As a community devoted to God, God's people enjoy His protection and intercession. But failure to live right before God and our fellow man means not only the natural consequences of a wicked society but also the intervention of God's judgment. Thus, God's people cannot expect the joy of His blessings if we persist to fail in our duties to God and one another; the people must repent because the judgment of God is certain.

But before God would hold Judah in the balance of judgment, He would grant one last call for repentance; a forerunner would precede that terrible day and herald the coming of God's kingdom in the earth.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Mal 3:16-4:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.